

# 5 Ways to Improve Care Using Family Wellness Plans (FWP)

Federal law requires that infants born affected by substance misuse, withdrawal or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum (FASD) receive a Plan of Safe Care (called Family Wellness Plan in Orange County) that supports their families as well.

## Implement Universal Screening

According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), obtaining prenatal care and being able to speak openly with a physician about drug problems helps improve birth outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Healthcare providers can:

- Identify infants at risk of substance exposure early by verbally screening every person of birthing age with an evidence-based tool as a routine part of care
- Implement a prenatal FWP to ensure the infant's safety and address the needs of the child and family

<sup>1</sup>American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. (2022). *Substance use disorder in pregnancy*. Retrieved from <https://www.acog.org/advocacy/policy-priorities/substance-use-disorder-in-pregnancy>



## Take a Family-Centered Approach

Parents and children live within the context of a larger family system and families exist within the context of their community and culture. A family-centered approach provides:

- The opportunity for the mother/infant dyad to stay together, including during substance use disorder treatment
- The inclusion of services that support mutually therapeutic early attachment for infant and mother, as well as other caregivers, when the dyad are separated
- A comprehensive array of clinical treatment and supports that meet the needs of each member of the family including grandparents and other caregivers, not just the individual requesting care
- Culturally responsive and gender-specific services that serve the family



## Disrupt Stigma

When developing a FWP, practitioners can help reduce the stigma and bias associated with substance use by:

- Using a strengths-based perspective and focusing on what is going well.
- Honoring the individual's role as a parent and the child's attachment to the parent.
- Making mindful language choices. Use person-first, strengths-based language, and recognize words have power.
  - Person-first language shows that a person 'has a problem that can be treated' rather than 'is a problem.' For example, instead of 'addict', say 'person with a substance use disorder.'



**Responding to parents with empathy can help them engage in the work of recovery and maintain connection with their children, support systems, and community.**

## Plan for Transitions/Discharge Planning

The birth event is an opportune time to ensure families are referred to essential services to provide ongoing support. To learn how to talk about a FWP with a family, click [HERE](#). All of the following family-centered services should be included in the FWP:

- Developmental screening and assessment, including early intervention services
- Substance use disorder treatment services
- Medical services needed to meet the ongoing health needs of the newborn, family, and caregiver
- Wraparound support programs to address social determinants of health, parenting and other needs, such as home visiting or public health nursing programs



## Advance Equity and Inclusion

Some strategies to move toward inclusivity include:

- Recognize substance use disorder as a chronic disease and brain disorder, and reflect this understanding in language, responses, and policies
- Debunk common myths such as "Medication Assisted Treatment is substituting one drug for another"
- Understand and value data on accessing culturally appropriate treatment and recovery
- Integrate peers and recovery support specialists into service delivery and work with families

